

The Virginia Department of Education

Pupil Transportation Service

Transporting Children with Special Needs

Transporting of Oxygen on School Buses

Guidelines

To ensure access to a (FAPE) free appropriate public education, it may be necessary for school divisions to transport oxygen-dependant students. Transporting oxygen-dependent students requires that school bus operators and school bus attendants be informed about their specific needs and trained to handle them appropriately. We encourage local school districts to collaborate with local health departments to develop training programs that cover the special considerations and services for these students. As with all students, safety must be the first priority.

Oxygen itself does not burn, but it supports and accelerates combustion; therefore, the biggest hazard of oxygen is the increased risk of fire. In oxygen-enriched atmospheres, almost every material will burn. The more oxygen that is present, the easier it is for a fire to ignite, and the fire will be bigger, faster, and hotter than in “normal” air.

Oxygen should only be carried on a bus when medically necessary and specified in the student’s IEP. Each local school district is responsible for making the decision of transporting oxygen on their district buses. Determination of need and planning for contingencies should be done with the cooperation of the school nurse or other trained medical personnel.

When it is determined that a student must be transported on a school bus accompanied by medical support equipment including oxygen, it is strongly recommended that an aide/bus assistant also be assigned.

Emergency plans should cover response procedures for the bus driver, the aide and dispatch in the event of a medical emergency, equipment failure, or crash. All personnel should receive training appropriate to the plan.

The following precautions should be taken to assure that medical oxygen being transported for passengers personal use is handled and transported safely:¹

- Transport oxygen cylinders in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. The manufacturer’s instructions and precautions are usually printed on a label attached to the cylinder.

¹ Florida Department of Education School Transportation Management Section, *Safely Transporting Oxygen-Dependent Students in School Buses* TSN No.T-06-03, (December 14,2005), Florida Department of Education,2.

- Before allowing the oxygen cylinder on board, inspect each cylinder to ensure that it is free of cracks or leaks, including the area around the valve and pressure relief device. Listen for leaks; do not load leaking cylinders on the bus. Visually inspect the cylinders for dents, gouges, or pits. A cylinder that is dented, gouged, or pitted should not be transported.
- Limit the number of cylinders to be transported on board the bus to the extent practicable.
- Carry the cylinder carefully using both hands; oxygen cylinders are susceptible to valve damage if dropped. Do not drag or roll a cylinder, and never carry a cylinder by the valve or regulator.
- Secure each cylinder to prevent movement and leakage. Each cylinder should be loaded and secured in an upright position.
- Secure oxygen cylinders away from sources of heat or potential sparks, since the release of oxygen from a cylinder could accelerate a fire.
- The school bus should not be used to store oxygen.
- All oxygen containers should be secured in a location that would allow all passengers free access to or egress from emergency exits.
- Oxygen tanks or other medical support equipment shall never be stored or secured in an area where the wheel chair occupant could strike against it in a crash situation.
- While “**not a requirement,**” a decal indicating medical support equipment is in use and a placard indicating compressed oxygen on board should be placed in a visible position on the exterior side of the bus to assist emergency personnel in the event of a crash. This decal may not exceed 10 x 7 inches and shall be removed when oxygen is no longer on board.

The transportation of oxygen on a school bus creates additional concerns for all responsible. Prior planning and proper training are essential to ensure the safe transport and evacuation of pupil passengers. School divisions are strongly encouraged to ensure that emergency evacuation plans for oxygen-dependent students and their transport are developed, in their proper place and practiced.

For additional information, please contact the Virginia Department of Education’s Pupil Transportation Service at (804) 225-2037.